2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

V

MEDICINE

I. RATIONAL AND MYSTICAL PROCEDURES

755 757 THE term 'medicine' has been adopted mainly because it is simple and convenient without distorting too much the meaning of the Nupe word *cigbe*. The English equivalent, however, does not quite render the implications of the vernacular concept; for though the latter includes typical remedies, that is, materials applied for a strictly therapeutic purpose (as the Nupe see it), it equally includes materials whose alleged efficacy goes far beyond the treatment of ailments. In this latter sense *cigbe* is a substance or object which exercises remote and miraculous effects upon the efficacy of other objects, for example, tools or weapons, upon the outcome of human efforts of all kinds, and upon human fate in general. The correct though clumsy translation, then, would be 'efficacious substance' or 'force-in-substance' (as *kuti* meant 'force-in-ritual').

755 757 278 Indeed, the important thing about *cigbe* is that it is always a substance, compounded of natural materials which anyone in possession of the recipe can collect and process by relatively simple procedures such as pulverizing, boiling, mixing, or charring. Most Nupe, incidentally, maintain that the essential ingredients of *cigbe* are always roots of trees.[1] It is tempting to conclude that here the empirical knowledge of the processes of plant growth has led to the assumption of some inherent but communicable force stored up in the roots of plants and trees. Which assumption would fit in well with the idea that all forms of illness connote a weakening of the life soul. But no one theorizes on these lines. Altogether, Nupe medicine shows little concern with theory, metaphysical or otherwise. As regards the alleged importance of roots, the various *cigbe* recipes show that herbs, grasses, the leaves of trees, or animal matter are employed as often. The power of *cigbe*, then, lies in materials of almost any sort if suitably processed and combined, and the knowledge of *cigbe* is precisely this skill of 'using ingredients'.[1]

[1] Two informants, in fact, assured me that the very word *cigbe* was a contraction of *cigbá gbere*, 'tree root'.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

755 757 813

We must now ask—to what extent is this knowledge empirically sound and the skill rationally employed? It can obviously not be entirely so since the non-therapeutic version of *cigbe*, credited as it is with remote effects upon objects or human actions, reveals at first sight already its non-empirical, miraculous nature. Yet the twofold use of medicine, therapeutic as well as non-therapeutic, suggests the corresponding distinction between rational practices and others irrational or 'magical'. To some extent this will prove a valid distinction, though one far less clear-cut or consistent; and this in turn is partly due to the ambiguity of the concept of rationality when it is applied to the practices of a primitive people. For they may act with rational intent but insufficient or faulty knowledge, so that their would-be empirical practices will conflict with our scientific knowledge, and hence strike us as irrational or 'magical'; while in a sense the converse case may equally occur.

I spoke of this before and need here only state the four possibilities entailed in these considerations. First, a procedure 'subjectively' rational, involving for the people the application of ordinary learned skills, may also be 'objectively' rational, that is, appropriate to the ends for which it is employed. Secondly, a subjectively rational procedure may prove futile and incongruous when assessed by 'objective' standards. Thirdly, a procedure professedly supernatural or mystical may yet prove appropriate, concealing some valid empirical principle. Lastly, a professedly mystical procedure may be such also from our point of view, that is, empirically false and incapable of achieving the ends for which it is employed.

Before examining each possibility in turn we must restate our criteria for assessing the mystical as against the professedly rational intent behind *cigbe* practice. In a very general sense, every *cigbe* procedure implies both kinds of intent. For even though Nupe medicine is, by definition, 'knowledge', which is usually purely technical as well as transferable through tuition or purchase, it is also given a mythical pedigree and related to the remoteness of God.[1] But these mystical associations are left almost entirely unemphasized, furnishing only a vague and ineffectual background, and can thus be disregarded. If, then, we are to credit certain procedures with mystical intent, they must exhibit it in a more pronounced and specific fashion. In the most obvious case the manufacture or application of *cigbe* will involve invocations of the deity and sacrifices proper, that is, open appeals for supernatural intervention. Where these are absent, we may yet search for that other evidence, of awe, fear, and a sense of the extraordinary or miraculous, which would set the procedure apart from pursuits

[1] See above, p. 18.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

and interests of a profane kind. The 'sense of the extraordinary' if it is not vouchsafed by verbal expressions, is clearly the most difficult to identify. But it is at least likely to go together with uncommon procedures and with rigid rules, barring even minute departures from a given course of action, that is, with ritualization. In sum I would list these criteria of professedly mystical as against professedly rational intent: the degree of ritualization implied in the preparation or application of medicines; their secrecy or otherwise; their commercial or non-commercial, public or private character; the diverse ways in which the knowledge of *cigbe* is transmitted; and the different kinds of faith placed in it.

If previously we described 'ritual' behaviour as behaviour exhibiting a degree of rigidity not accounted for by its professed aim, we may now say, of the 'ritualized' procedure of *cigbe*, that its rigidity is not accounted for by the rational intent. For the Nupe, the latter lies in the application of material substances which as such possess a given efficacy. But often we find additional and incongruous rules such as these: certain medicines may only be prepared in certain months of the year; in certain treatments a particular procedure must be repeated three times; in the operation of setting a broken limb four splints (no more and no less) must be used. Here, then, the Nupe no longer rely on the empirical or pseudo-empirical knowledge of 'ingredients'; rather, they abandon their own 'scientific' principles, diluting them with rules of a different order—with ritual, and hence with 'mystic' observances.

Again, certain medicines, their preparation and disposal, are cloaked in rigorous secrecy, while others are not secret or no more secret than the skills or tricks of a particular trade. The latter kind is usually freely bought and sold, while the secret medicines can be given away only with special formalities or not at all, being accessible only to the relatives or perhaps friends of the 'owner'; so that some medicines are available to the public, like any commercial commodity, and others are unalterably 'private'. As we know, the knowledge of *cigbe* is mostly transmitted through ordinary teaching, and is such as any clever, observant, or widely-travelled person can acquire; but occasionally it is hereditary, the ultimate provenance of the knowledge remaining unexplained. Finally, while no one would assume that ordinary remedies, administered without ceremonial, are infallible, precisely this faith is put in the other, 'miraculous', medicines, even if they involve no explicit appeals to the deity.

These features, however, occur with varying degrees of definiteness; and, though they all hang together logically, they do not always appear together in practice. But considered singly, they

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

offer only ambiguous criteria. Ritualization, for example, especially when it is slight, may represent only an item of 'knowledge', empirically futile and 'superstitious', but for all that entirely profane. And secrecy may attach to medicines, not because they are sacred or credited with miraculous efficacy, but because they are morally reprehensible. Our assessment of 'mystical' and 'rational' intent will therefore sometimes be uncertain and admit of borderline cases. Even so, it enables us to examine *cigbe* practice in the terms of the four 'possibilities' mentioned before.

(i) It is clear that this possibility can apply only to the therapeutic medicines. But only very few even of these satisfy our two conditions of rational intent and objective appropriateness. For several of the therapeutic medicines require the accompaniment of invocations or sacrifices, or otherwise exhibit at least an admixture of mystical intent; and those which do not, often fail on the second count. It is clear, however, that in this relatively backward society we must not assess the appropriateness or otherwise of remedies by too exacting a standard. Thus, if they do not conflict in principle with our scientific ideas and are such that their efficacy might at least conceivably be of the alleged kind, their actual worthlessness may be ignored; at least, it does not make them 'mystical', but only shows them to be crude, inadequate, or ill-chosen. This would be true of such remedies as herbal potions used for intestinal troubles, of salves or powders rubbed into snake-bites, or of certain simple surgical treatments. Few of these betray any true medical lore; the surgical operations are rarely applied and have little merit; most potions or salves prove on chemical analysis to have no positive value, though I found none that was actually harmful and a few that had a slight medicinal property, such as the absorptive or laxative effect of charred vegetable matter. Even so, these practices are at least of the right kind or resemble the right kind of treatment, and will for this reason be included in our first category.

Many more treatments are without even this semblance of appropriateness, suggesting merely blundering attempts, unguided even by faulty knowledge. Lunacy, for example, is treated by means of inhalations; smallpox is prevented by burning herbs in the entrance hut; pregnancy, by the wearing of a 'magic' belt; and for rheumatic pains one has this abstruse cure: the patient stands inside a hut, pressing the aching part of his body against the wall; the doctor stands outside and holds the 'medicine' with his foot against the wall, opposite the place where, on the inside, the patient's body touches the wall; the doctor then slowly drags the medicine to the ground, thus 'drawing the pain from the body'. Though this treatment seems to imply some crude

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

reasoning from analogy, it clearly belongs, with all the other treatments just mentioned, to our second category, of practices utterly incongruous and not even conceivably capable of the alleged effects.

We must add, further, that a great many therapeutic remedies are ascribed so multifarious an efficacy that their 'rational' application to one kind of ailment is belied by the other, extravagant claims. The same substance will serve as an antidote for snakebite, as a cure for headaches, and as a potion applied in ordeals; and a herbal concoction for intestinal troubles will also be used to cure rheumatic pains in the fantastic manner just described. Thus the borderline between rational and pseudo-rational treatments is once more blurred, and the province of the former narrowed further. And here we may note that in a sense the Nupe wish to keep it narrow. For the one version of medicine which comes nearest to satisfying our two conditions of rational intent and empirical (if crude) appropriateness, that practised by the barber-doctors, is also criticized for this very reason. The barber-doctors are entirely profane practitioners, whose skill is a matter of cleverness and learning, involves no secrecy, and is at the disposal of all who can pay for their services. But their practice is largely restricted to the capital and the more sophisticated large villages, and little known or little thought of elsewhere. Indeed, the country people simply laugh when you suggest that the barbers have a knowledge of *cigbe*; 'barbers', I was always told, 'know no *cigbe*; all they can do is to cure headache'. Now some of my informants certainly knew that this was incorrect; furthermore, several village *cigbe* of the secret and mystical kind were also supposed to cope with headache. It was therefore not the efficacy of the remedies which the people held in ridicule but their purely profane character; and in denying that the barbers possessed any worthwhile knowledge of medicine, they really denied that their knowledge deserved the name of medicine. We note, then, a bias towards excluding from the genus *cigbe* those remedies which combine all the characteristics of a rational practice. The true *cigbe*, the people seem to feel, must at least in some respects bear the mark of the extraordinary or 'magical'. But this is no more than a bias since even in the villages where the art of the barber-doctors was so derided there exist purely profane, would-be rational remedies.[1] Their number, however, is strikingly small; so that in the peasant culture of Nupe, unlike the urban culture of the capital, the non-mystical or non-'magical' *cigbe* represents an exception from the rule.

[1] Also, this 'bias' is being obliterated by the modern usage of the word *cigbe* for all European drugs and medical appliances, in which the Nupe see nothing transcendental or magical, but the application of 'knowledge' proper.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

(ii) We have already mentioned the therapeutic medicines which fall in this category in virtue of their fantastic nature or of the extravagant claims made for them. We need only add that there are no non-therapeutic *cigbe*, that is, medicines at first sight already 'miraculous' and irrational, which are handled in a would-be rational manner; all also imply at least some expression of mystical intent.

(iii) Strictly speaking, this possibility of professedly mystical but unwittingly appropriate practices does not apply to Nupe medicine. Trance possession attributed to spirits, magic dances meant to cure mental disorders, and similar treatments which might conceal a psycho-therapeutic efficacy under the mystical trappings are altogether absent. But the combination of invocations and sacrifices with remedies which are 'of the right kind' constitutes a borderline case since the people would attribute the success of the remedy (such as it is) as much to supernatural intervention as to the inherent properties of the ingredients employed. In a sense even the most absurd therapeutic remedies have a share of such a concealed empirical efficacy. In calling them absurd and worthless we were considering only their intrinsic inappropriateness to the effects ascribed to them; we cannot deny that the patient's trust in the efficacy of the medicine or the repute of the doctor may well produce at least an apparent relief. Which means, further, that the practitioner's medical notions will repeatedly receive some empirical support, whose spuriousness he is unable to judge.

(iv) Our last category comprises all the non-therapeutic medicines and a considerable number of therapeutic ones. Their objective irrationality cannot be mistaken. When a potion is said to make a person invisible, a salve to secure invulnerability, a herbal concoction kept in the village to keep away smallpox, or a powder applied to a hoe to double the farm output, there can clearly be no question but that only a miracle could make these 'medicines' effective. Nor is the mystical intent any less certain, being visible in the prescribed invocations, sacrifices, forms of ritualism, and so forth. It is interesting to note that several of these practices are based upon the principle 'like causes like'; by itself, this spurious 'theory would not establish the mystical intent since for the people it represents only one more item of would-be scientific knowledge. The same principle, in fact, also underlies a few therapeutic and strictly profane cures. But it seems significant that it is employed on a large scale only in the fully irrational practices, that is, in situations where success is vouchsafed also by mystical procedures. In other words, false knowledge tends to go together with transcendental guarantees (though more sound knowledge does not necessarily discard them).

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

755 757 813 Let me summarize. By our criteria of rational and mystical intent the whole range of non-therapeutic *cigbe* together with a good portion of the therapeutic ones would fall in the category of transcendental practices (religious or 'magical'); while only the rest of the cures proper, good, bad, and indifferent, would belong on the side of reason or near-reason. And since a great many of the cures in the former category are 'objectively' as futile or absurd as the non-therapeutic variety, it may be said that the Nupe tend to treat as 'magical' what is, by all standards, magical and to aim at miraculous effects by means openly designed for miracles.

2. PHARMACOPOEIA NUPEANA

757 278 759 It seems convenient to insert here a fuller description of Nupe medicines and medical (or pseudo-medical) treatments. Their therapeutic or non-therapeutic character will become clear from the description, as will also the share of 'irrational' or mystical observances. We must, however, anticipate the various classes of medicine experts and briefly state their respective specialities. First, we have the guild of barber doctors, who are all Mohammedans and whose craft is entirely therapeutic and would-be empirical; a few minor instances of 'ritualization' do not contradict the generally rational intent. Secondly, there is the corresponding and predominantly pagan order of *cigbeciži* or *bociži* ('medicine-men'), whose practice, both therapeutic and non-therapeutic, invariably betrays mystical intent. Thirdly, there are a few individual experts who belong to neither organization and may employ any kind of *cigbe*. Lastly, we shall meet with the owners of hereditary medicines, vested in the lineage or (in Nupe parlance) 'house'; these are both therapeutic and non-therapeutic, and always conspicuously mystical. In one isolated case a conspicuously 'mystical' medicine is owned by a whole community. Let me also recall that some medical practitioners are diviners at the same time, though there is no firmer link between the two professions.

757 278 These are some of the remedies known to the barber-doctors of Bida. Stomach trouble is treated by means of various potions: one consists of the infusion of a certain swamp plant; another, of the infusion of the charred bark of the oil-palm, sheanut tree or locust-bean tree, mixed with natron;[1] a third, of the pounded roots of a certain tree, mixed with powdered eggshell, dried in the sun and then taken with water. Light headache is cured by burning a certain common plant and making the patient inhale the fumes,

[1] The 'natron' is natural carbonate of soda from Lake Chad which is on sale in all Nupe markets.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

possible application of the principle 'like cures like', no one today is aware of this notion. Nor are there any 'theories' as regards such abstruse ingredients as eggshells, the excreta of fowls, twigs from the nest of vultures, or grass from inside an ant-heap. Yet it is also difficult to see how the precept, 'experiment with the help of God', can have led to these peculiar discoveries. If they are 'superstitions', they are not, like other superstitions, the degraded offspring of more elaborate mystic or cosmological speculations. The treatment of lunacy, with its 'male' and 'female' ingredients, seems to suggest something of the kind; but there is no clear link between this cure and that other idea, that lunacy is a residue of 'male' sleeping sickness.[1] And in all the other fantastic remedies their intellectual antecedents are simply not traceable, not even to legends or folk-tales. Perhaps the remedies have been adopted, more or less blindly, from other groups and countries, on some of those informative travels of which the barber-doctors boast. As they stand, they are merely crude and absurd attempts at 'empirical' treatment, instances of that 'blundering' I spoke of before.

Any of the medicines just described might equally be the product of the *cigbeciži*, and a number are in fact identical. But unlike the barber-doctors, the *cigbeciži* also employ the fully irrational, non-therapeutic version of *cigbe*, and even their remedies proper, salves, potions, and the like, are much more often based on recipes of an incongruous and abstruse kind.[2] Thus a 'strong' potion taken for intestinal troubles includes the fluid extracted from the gall-bladder of snakes, a potion alleged to cure smallpox contains a boiled lizard tail, and an ointment for rheumatic pains is composed, among other things, of powdered potsherds which must be obtained from old pots found lying about with the broken side up, any other position rendering the remedy worthless.

While these recipes seem as random and arbitrary as the more abstruse examples of the barber-doctors' art, others betray some underlying 'theory', some vague and often uncertain reasoning from analogy or from the principle 'like cures like'. Thus one expert had a cure for impotence consisting of a potion whose ingredients included, besides various roots and two kinds of pepper, also the powdered genitals of a he-goat.[3] A contraceptive credited with lasting effect is concocted from the roots of the

[1] See above, p. 37.

[2] Of the twenty-two *cigbeci* medicines I recorded fifteen belonged to that category, while the corresponding proportion in the case of the barbers' remedies was six in thirty-four.

[3] I have this incongruous evidence for the efficacy of the treatment. My servant, who was with me when I visited the expert, at once bought and drunk the potion to increase his virility. The next day I had to doctor him for severe indigestion.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

tamarind tree, leaves of baobab, sorghum stalks, and the skin of a fish said to 'die at once when you hold it in your hand', the last ingredient being the most important. Another, temporary, contraceptive is prepared with grass taken from an ant-heap which must have three round mounds and must be broken open with the heel. The magic belt mentioned before, said to prevent pregnancy, is made of leather into which these two ingredients are sewn—hair from the tail of a mule and seeds from locust-beans 'forgotten' (i.e. overlooked) at the harvest. The reasoning from analogy is fairly obvious in the recipe for impotence and in the last appliance. In the lasting contraceptive the underlying 'theory' seems to rest upon this argument: since a freshly caught fish stands for fertility (in dream interpretation), a fish that 'dies at once' might plausibly be identified with its destruction. And of ants, which figure in the temporary contraceptive, it is said that 'one does not know their father and mother'; so that a medicine derived from ants would seem to promise precisely what its users desire. The former 'theory' is my own inference, while the latter, as we shall see, is explicitly mentioned. But it is incomplete apart from being abstruse; for it fails to account for the three mounds that are required and for the peculiar method of opening the ant-heap; nor yet does it state why grass taken from an ant-heap should, in other remedies, serve quite a different purpose.

The moral attitude of the *cigbeciži* towards such dubious practices as facilitating contraception and sterility differs considerably from that of the barber-doctors. While the latter simply claim that they have no chance of dispensing these remedies and shift the blame on their pagan colleagues, these both admit dealing in them and try to justify their actions. They maintain that they dispense these medicines only rarely and in deserving cases. At least, this is true of the medicine alleged to procure permanent sterility; the expert in question assured me that he had given it only once, out of pity, to a woman whose husband was forcing her to sleep with him while her first-born had not yet been weaned. In the case of the temporary expedients the conscience of the *cigbeciži* is more easily satisfied; they merely put up the price for frivolous clients, that is, for 'rich people who do not want children'. As a corrollary, the medicine for impotence is similarly expensive (costing as much as ten shillings), not only because it is difficult to prepare, but because it is something of a luxury; for the expert argued that since this remedy did not 'save people from death' but afforded them 'enjoyment' it was worth paying for. He was fairminded enough to add that he would lower the price in the case of poor clients.

As regards the non-therapeutic medicines, they are credited

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

755 with widely varying but uniformly fantastic properties. Thus a certain potion is said to make you invisible and invulnerable to guns; a similar protection is afforded by a powder carried in a leather bag which must be of two colours, red and black. Another powder, which may either be drunk in water or rubbed on the gun, assures success in big-game hunting. Two potions protect the drinker from all evil-wishers, who would in one case be struck with lunacy or sleeping sickness and in the other with blindness. It is interesting to note that while one of these medicines, called *zabadi*, can be used by both sexes, the other, called *imi-ya-ga* (both undecipherable words) is designed for women only. Conversely, there is a 'male' medicine called *eshe*; its composition is extremely complicated, numbering fifteen ingredients, and it can be rubbed on the body or on a hoe, or buried in farmland: its effect is to divert the fertility of all adjacent fields to the one farmed by the owner of the *cigbe*. Finally, there are two medicines associated with witchcraft; the first is the 'female' medicine *imi-ya-ga*, which, used as a potion or as an ointment or simply kept in the house, protects you from witches as well as spirits; the other is a potion called *waka*, which must be taken by the performers in the anti-witchcraft cult *ndakó gboyá* but is deadly to the uninitiated. Most of these medicines serve more than one function. Thus a snake-bite antidote called *dabwalé* can also be used as ordeal or kept in the house to guard it against thieves (who would be bitten by a snake), and the anti-witchcraft remedy *waka* similarly protects the house where it is kept, the thief being punished with blindness.

[754]

As has already been mentioned, the *cigbeciži* always employ professedly mystical procedures. To some extent these are visible already in the conspicuous ritualization attaching to certain of their remedies. More importantly, the practice of the *cigbeciži* also involves ritual invocations and rigid rules of secrecy, though the latter refer only to the recipe itself and do not otherwise restrict the use or disposal of the medicines. The invocation consists of the proper name for the medicine and of its particular *emisa* or 'greeting'. The names themselves do not necessarily distinguish this species of *cigbe* from the other, profane, variety; for several of the barbers' remedies similarly have names, which serve as labels and abbreviated references to the composition or efficacy of the medicine. Some of the names given to the *cigbeci* medicines, however, are more mystically obscure and as inexplicable as the names of most *kuti* or those that occur in divining. The *emisa* are fully ritual formulæ: they must be uttered, without the slightest deviation and in a respectful and humble manner, at various stages in the preparation of the *cigbe* and whenever it is dispensed. They play much the same part as the 'greetings' used in divining and

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

are, like the latter, composed of sayings more or less trivial or apposite. A medicine alleged to facilitate childbirth, for example, is called *lamá*, from *lá má 'gi*, 'causing childbirth', and has a meaningless 'greeting'; the antidote for snake-bite *dabwalé* (an undecipherable word) commands the following 'greeting'—'The thing for washing, when a snake bites a person, (this) thing drives the illness away'. The 'contraceptive' made of grass taken from special ant-heaps, is called *botáfī*, a word derived from *botá*, the name for a species of grass and *fī*, 'to drink'; when the grass is removed from the ant-heap one repeats three times: 'One does not know the father of ants; one does not know the mother of ants'; of which crude allusion to the users of this remedy we have already spoken. The 'greeting' of another contraceptive remedy similarly plays upon an analogy—'A person without speech cannot tell', which means, a woman without fertility cannot bear children. The miraculous medicine alleged to make a person invisible and invulnerable has a name and 'greeting' which are highly suggestive; it is called *akpára*, the Nupe word for 'rifle', and is addressed thus—'The night brings darkness. The eye sees in daylight, the eye does not see at night. There is nothing inside the earth save God' (that is, save things God alone can see, as he alone can see a person who has applied this medicine).

Perhaps the term 'invocations' will seem inappropriate in the case of these nondescript addresses or 'greetings'. But let me leave this point for the moment and only mention that invocations proper also have their place in *cigbe* practice. The *cigbeci*, like the barber-doctor, may add some new medicine to those already known; at least, this is true of the head of the order of 'medicine-men'. And whenever he discovers or invents a new remedy, he must perform a sacrifice composed of beer, a fowl, and a small portion of the new *cigbe*, speaking thus—'God, the medicine that has been prepared, here it is. May the medicine be successful. I am sacrificing to Kpara, I am sacrificing to Tswasha Malu, I am sacrificing to Tswako Dzana.' The names mentioned are those of ancestors of the head of the *cigbeci* guild; and the sacrifice is performed over the vessel in which the new medicine will henceforth be kept. As we shall see, both the invocation of ancestors and the treatment of the medicine vessel almost as a sacred shrine are features typical also of the hereditary medicines, which even more conspicuously reveal their irrational or mystical intent.

To turn to the medicines known to individuals. We may mention first that certain simple treatments are familiar to nearly everyone, being applied in the manner of household remedies or as a kind of 'first aid'; only when this fails or seems inadequate does one turn to 'professional' medicines. And even then one often asks friends

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

Among the non-therapeutic medicines we meet again with the substance which makes invisible, and with another which enables you to see witches and also protects you from them. The latter consists of various rare roots and four cowrie shells, sewn into a leather bag dyed black and red, which you must keep under your pillow while asleep. Before handing the charm to the customer it is buried for one night together with a live chameleon, which contact communicates to the charm the peculiar powers of the animal (which is said to 'see in the dark'). The invisibility potion is concocted from the head, blood, and claws of a completely black fowl, a creeper torn off a tree while one's eyes are covered by a black cloth, and a mudfish. The emphasis on black accords with this notion of a substance whose effect resembles that of darkness and which is in fact known as *badúfu*, a mixed Nupe–Hausa word meaning 'dark place'.[1] The symbolism of covering your eyes is obvious, as is that of the mudfish, which buries itself in the riverbed. The same substance, in powder form, may also be carried in a black leather bag on the body, though in this case a piece of human skin must be added.[2]

There are several other non-therapeutic *cigbe* of less gruesome nature. The following examples all come from the same source, old Ndakotsu of Bida, a descendant of the old Beni chiefs and a noted diviner and 'wise man'. His medicines were as secret as they were fantastic; yet though they were not for sale, they were freely given to friends and acquaintances or to the young men over whose age grades Ndakotsu presided. Neither the application nor the preparation of these medicines involves invocations, sacrifices and the like; but their professedly mystical character is usually clear from the peculiar nature of their efficacy, which is attributed to the power of *fifíngi* of animals or plants and hence presupposes explicitly religious conceptions. All medicines also imply, more or less clearly, the principle 'like causes like'. One example, mentioned before, is the powder applied to hoes which causes them to 'double' their output; its effect rests on one particular ingredient, leaves from a palm-tree split in two by lightning, the 'doubling' of the tree being responsible for the doubled efficiency of the tool. Another farming 'medicine', meant to secure a rich yam harvest, is made up of the head and left leg of a bush rodent and some grass torn out by the roots, and must be buried annually in the farmland in a new, covered pot; the explanation is that the *fifíngi* of the rodent, which is known to feed on yams, will 'steal' all the yams

[1] For a different meaning of this term see below, p. 159.

[2] I was offered this useful *cigbe*, but the deal broke down since I was unable to supply the human skin, to the great surprise of the expert, who thought that I could easily obtain it from the local hospital.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

(that is, their *fifíngi*) from the surrounding farmlands and carry them to yours. A rich grain harvest can be obtained by taking the head of an ass or donkey, its saddle cloth, and the excreta of a person who dies of smallpox, tying the three 'ingredients' into a bundle hung from a palm-tree on the farm: the grain will then grow as high as a person, since the *fifíngi* of the donkey, used to carrying loads on its back, will endeavour to 'pull up' the grain 'like a load'. Farmers can finally prepare a potent drink made of a black monkey's left leg, some leaves driven into a heap by a whirlwind, and beer: they will then work 'as fast as the whirlwind' and as 'tirelessly as a monkey'. Ndakotsu's father is reported to have owned also one of those protective *cigbe* which punish evil-wishers; it is said to have been particularly vicious, inflicting body-ache on any person who so much as stared at you. Nothing further, however, is known about this medicine, which has since been lost.

The picture changes again when we turn to the medicines hereditary in families or 'houses' or belonging to communities. Let me quote these examples. In Jebba Island I recorded an hereditary *cigbe* called *fúnagba*, which cures headache, pains in the body, and barrenness, and can either be drunk or used externally. Its composition is complicated, including seven ingredients, six of which are roots of specific trees and the seventh the root of any tree growing across a footpath (such roots being particularly 'strong'); these ingredients must be mixed with beer, blood of fowl (that is, the common materials for sacrifices), and some Niger water fetched by a young girl. Apart from its therapeutic effect, this medicine also protects the house from thieves and evil-minded intruders. In another village on the Niger I found a medicine called *atafá*, which has only the latter effect; it could, in fact, never be renewed if it were actually dispensed since its composition is unknown. In several villages I met with a medicine called *wasa* or *gába*, compounded of ten ingredients, one of which is the boiled head of a poisonous snake, severed before it released the poison; this medicine operates as an antidote against snake-bite, as a cure for stomach-ache, and sometimes also as a potion applied in ordeals; while its presence in the house affords protection from thieves and evil-doers. A medicine called *égbo*, from Shari, is used to treat headache and stomach-ache, and is also taken by the devotees of the *ndakó gboyá* before they put on the masks that go with the cult. Then there is the Jebba medicine *zumácikã*, which belongs to the village and is believed to protect the community from smallpox; as we remember, its composition is unknown and it acts through merely being present.[1]

[1] See above, p. 91.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

Most of these medicines, then, are 'multifarious', combining a therapeutic with a mystical or 'magical' efficacy. The latter may even be paramount and take an extreme form, as in the medicines efficacious by their mere presence and of unknown composition. Equally, these medicines are treated as 'magical'. They may only be prepared in certain months and not in others, unlike all other medicines; and while the latter are kept in the usual household containers, gourds or ordinary pots, the hereditary medicines are preserved in special earthen vessels, placed apart and decorated in the manner of sacred objects, with a strip of white cloth, a ring of palm-fronds or a crown of white chicken feathers. They all have mystically obscure names and more or less elaborate *emisa*, and some also involve regular sacrifices, either when the *cigbe* is newly prepared or on the occasion of the usual kinship rites and invocations of ancestoral *kuci*. Finally, all these medicines are extremely secret and never sold for money, if indeed they are disposed of at all; if so, they may be given away only to close relations or perhaps friends, as a free gift 'for the sake of God'. Nor is their recipe (even if it is known) ever taught to others.

The special position of the hereditary *cigbe* is reflected in the nomenclature, for these medicines alone merit the epithet 'great', while all other medicines are called 'little'. Let us note that the verbal distinction refers, not so much to the miraculous effects with which the *cigbe* is credited, as to the procedure it sets in motion; for even a 'great' medicine may only cure headache or stomach trouble, at least with part of its efficacy. But the 'great' medicine alone involves proper acts of worship; and as it is bound up with the identity of kin groups through being hereditary, so it serves as a focus of kinship life, affording its supernatural aid primarily or even exclusively to the group to which it belongs and mobilizing it in the fashion of kinship rituals. The 'greatness' of the *cigbe*, then, lies in its social implications rather than in its concrete efficacy. Let us note also that its very 'ownership' is far from concrete. For the *cigbe* whose composition is unknown is also never examined, being renewed only from the beer and blood of the sacrifice. What is truly 'owned', is not any tangible, physical substance but only the vessel in which it is supposed to exist; so that this becomes a shrine for religious ministrations indistinguisable from ritual proper.

3. THE FAITH IN MEDICINE

The distinction between 'great' and 'little' medicines is drawn only by the practitioners and 'owners' of *cigbe*. The bulk of the people know little about these implications, and so grade the

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

755 medicines differently. For them, medicines are simply either easily
184 procured or not, available to the 'public' or monopolized, by families or perhaps communities. And they conclude, equally simply, that the more secret and private a medicine, the more powerful it must be. Experts and public, we may say, speak different languages. And here certain other discrepancies also arise. There are a great many stories current about extremely powerful (and extremely secret) medicines 'owned' and rarely if ever disposed of by certain villages, families or occupational groups (blacksmiths, hunters). When you know the 'owners' you will usually discover either that they credit the medicine with far less impressive powers or that it is by no means as secret as the public believes, or even that the medicine in question does not exist. Again, the people generally are convinced that certain very 'private' and miraculous medicines can yet be acquired at exorbitant prices: in reality, the medicines so described may not be for sale or, once more, may not exist. The public is also impressed or swayed by certain clever tricks which the experts perform with the ingredients of medicine in order to astonish the layman and advertise their skill but which they never regard as a true part of their craft. Thus a certain medicine for headache and stomach pains can be shown to extinguish flames or, more wonderful still, to make hands and feet insensible to burns; a piece of ironwood used in a very secret anti-witchcraft medicine can be shown miraculously to sink in water. But the Nupe expert rarely resorts to this method of self-advertisement; rather, he strongly insists on the difference between *cigbe* and *enya mã*, mere 'conjuring tricks', such as the Hausâ charm peddlers and 'magicians' are fond of performing. Nor does he ever offer 'fakes', of this or any other kind, for the 'real thing' or show any cynicism regarding the value of his products. He believes in them as much as do his clients; and if their trust shows in the eagerness and awe with which they approach the expert, his seriousness and scrupulous attention to detail leave no doubt as to his good faith.

755 The question arises, what concrete proof the believers can have of the efficacy of the more fantastic and 'magical' medicines. In the case of the therapeutic remedies there exists, as I suggested, at least the possibility of some apparent if spurious empirical support; also their efficacy is understood to be in some measure uncertain and subject to the will of God. But no amount of belief in those medicines which turn a man into a miraculously successful farmer or make him invulnerable and invisible can conjure up the desired proof. The confidence inspired by their possession may indeed make the owner a keener farmer or a more courageous soldier and hunter; but though fortune may favour the brave it

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

falls lamentably short of the absolute assurance the Nupe place in these *cigbe*.

The answer to our question can only lie in the rigid secrecy which surrounds these magic medicines. No one using them will talk about it; indeed if he did, the efficacy of the magic would be gone. Thus, though I might use the wonderful farming *cigbe*, my neighbours may, for all I know, also use it, or even a stronger version; and though I could make myself invulnerable, my enemies might have *cigbe* to make their guns infallible. If in these instances the belief in *cigbe* is such that it protects itself from being disproved, this is even more so in the case of the *cigbe* protecting you from witchcraft. For this is clearly itself an imaginary threat whose defeat by an imaginary weapon is altogether outside empirical considerations. To some extent the efficacy of the medicines said to procure invisibility equally belongs to the realm of imaginary happenings. Two of the many informants with whom I discussed this point supplied the clue. The first, who himself owned this medicine and maintained that I too could use it with the desired effect, added this odd instruction: the medicine must be taken at night, before going to sleep. He meant by this that the medicine affected, not the physical body of a person awake, but the *fifingi*, the disembodied shadow soul, of persons asleep. The second informant was even more explicit. He explained that the person drinking the medicine was able, in *fifingi* shape, to wander about at night when all were asleep, to enter their houses unseen, to touch the bodies of the other sleepers, give them nightmares, and even to kill them if they struggled or hit out: to which extreme, however, no 'good' man would resort, save perhaps against enemies.

If we should consider invisibility achieved under such conditions to be hardly worth the trouble, let alone to prove the wonderful powers of the medicine, this is not so for the Nupe. For them, the medicine does two things one cannot 'normally' do; it enables you to control the movements of your *fifingi*, which otherwise wanders about at will, in the random fashion exemplified by dreams; and it causes the *fifingi* to be hidden from the people it visits, while ordinarily it would appear to them in their dreams. Furthermore, precisely such willed and hidden nightly visits are thought to be peculiar to witches, so that the *cigbe* makes you their equal. I must add, however, that the rest of my informants did not describe the efficacy of the invisibility *cigbe* in such mystic terms. They spoke of it as being concretely effective and hiding your body from the eyes of others when you meet them, say, in the street. But they would emphasize, as in the case of the other miraculous *cigbe* mentioned before, that this medicine must be used in utter secrecy

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

lest it lose its power. And here, it seems to me, we have the required loophole; for 'utter secrecy' I take to mean that the medicine may only be used at night, when you cannot be seen, or among strangers, when at least you cannot be recognized, that is, in situations when no one can prove anything. My informants refused to commit themselves on this point. But exactly this kind of argument was brought up in connection with another, similar, medicine not previously mentioned, namely, a *cigbe* said to enable a man to feign death and to arise from the grave unharmed and invisible; thus magically equipped he can disappear from his village unbeknown to all, to reappear, now in visible shape, in foreign parts. This seems to be the only advantage offered by this *cigbe*. Now this advantage, my informants assured me, was past, thanks to railways and motor-cars of all things; for nowadays the person using the *cigbe* could reach the strange place no more quickly than would others, using the modern means of transport. But it is not merely the utility of the *cigbe* which has disappeared, but its virtue. Since other people, travelling non-magically, might well arrive together with and run into the person who did so magically, the secrecy of the proceedings has been lost, and with it the efficacy of a *cigbe*. If this argument seems less compelling to us than to the Nupe, it yet confirms the point made before, that this notion of miraculous medicines protects itself from proof or disproof.

Let us return to the *emisa* which accompany various *cigbe* procedures. Clearly, they must have some share in fostering or confirming the faith which the people put in their mystical medicines. I have so far treated these formulæ mainly as evidence for 'mystical intent'; but they would seem to define a particular species of this intent and one particularly reassuring. For the *emisa* comes closest to a magic spell, having the same rigidity and being similarly indispensable for the desired effects; if so, it would turn the whole *cigbe* practice into a strictly magical procedure, that is, a procedure resting on the mechanical manipulation of substances and words rather than on appeals to some transcendental intelligence.

Neither conclusion, however, is quite correct. The names and addresses of *cigbe*, the Nupe insist, carry no power in themselves; this lies in the 'ingredients' alone. If the *emisa* is indispensable it is so only in the sense in which the titles and formal greetings of men of rank are indispensable, being meant to acknowledge or indicate the power that lies in the rank but adding nothing to it. Furthermore, the *emisa* of medicines is meant to acknowledge also the ultimate source of their power, that is, the presence and will of God. If the wording of the *cigbe* greetings hardly reveals that

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

exalted function, the Nupe would point out that other, ordinary 755 ●
'greetings' are similarly nondescript and uninformative. We re- 789
call, further, that on certain occasions the practice of *cigbe* also includes sacrifices and invocations proper, addressed to God or *kuci*.

We may conclude, then, that even the mechanical manipulations of *cigbe* carry some of that awareness of a transcendental intelligence which turns an otherwise 'magical' act into a religious appeal; and though the faith in this manipulation of 'ingredients' is partly a belief in their mechanical efficacy, this is yet understood to reflect, however indirectly, divine intervention. The *emisa* itself is neither fully a spell nor yet fully a prayer; it is an expression, couched in a conventionalized code, for the varieties of power mobilized in the *cigbe* procedure. Those who know the appropriate expressions also know the entities to which they refer and hence can manipulate them: for in the Nupe way of thinking as in ours there is no true and workable knowledge of anything unless that thing can also be named. Thus, though the *emisa* has no share in the powers it identifies and names, the very fact that it does so makes it an integral part of the mystically powerful operation. Finally, since these 'code' expressions are respectful ones, they stand, not for a simple command, but for a command tinged with submission, for a mastery which is half supplication. in brief, for 'invocations'.

4. THE PERSONNEL

The organization of the Nupe barber-doctors has been described 759
elsewhere, and I need here summarize only the main facts.[1] The barbers are grouped in three guilds, centred in Bida, one in each of the three sectors into which the town is divided. They travel a good deal; a number have also settled in the larger villages in the country, and quite a few in towns outside Nupe. Each guild has its own titled head, elected by the guild and confirmed by the *Etsu* Nupe, who is also the most experienced and most highly reputed member of the profession; which standing is measured, simply, by the number of treatments known to him. In all my discussions with barber-doctors it was always the guild-head who proved the best informed and to whom all others turned when in doubt or at a loss. The profession is loosely hereditary, some usually following in their fathers' footsteps; but men of other families may join the profession through being apprenticed to an established barber-doctor for about five years, during which period they pay for the tuition by surrendering the larger part of their earnings.

[1] See *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 289–301.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

of medicines almost as unequivocally evil. The same men, let us note, will also administer helpful, beneficial, 'good' medicine. On the whole, the latter are more numerous, and are considered more important when it comes to discussions or arguments. As for the others, the experts would claim that they take due precautions, giving the medicine away only to 'good people' and 'for the sake of God', not for ordinary gain. But these personal qualms do not explain away the confusion of moral standards and do not answer the question why practices contemptible by common agreement should yet be accepted and actively pursued. The answer seems to lie in the amoral character of the Nupe universe. There it is, composed of good things and bad, the handiwork of a deity which unconcernedly sets good beside evil. Man, it would seem, has no call to improve upon creation. The qualms of the *cigbeciži* are a concession to social conscience not to religious scruples; in the last resort they are concerned only with appearances—that their craft should not look like witchcraft. As regards the evil potentialities of 'medicine', they are accepted with the same optimistic cynicism with which the Nupe view the very world in which they live.

6. MODERN INFLUENCES

Islam has on the whole brought little change. It bans the hereditary medicines, since they approximate to the pagan worship of *kuci* and *kuti*, and may well have caused some of them to disappear. But the craft of the barber-doctors enjoys the respectability of a truly Mohammedan profession; while the medicines of individuals and the craft of the *cigbeciži* flourish among Mohammedans no less than among the pagans. Indeed many of these experts would regard themselves as good Moslems. Even the Master of the *cigbeciži* dresses like a Moslem, goes to the mosque, observes the fast and other rules of Islam, and boasts of his descent from men who served the Mohammedan Emirs of Nupe.

Nor do specifically Moslem practices compete seriously with the traditional craft. A great many mallams administer cures and sell charms or amulets, both prepared in strict accordance with the Moslem creed as they understand it. The cures all take the same form: the attributes of Allah or certain verses of the Qoran are written in ink on a wooden slate which is then washed clean, the inky water being drunk by the patient. The amulets, called *laya* (a Hausa word), consist of pieces of paper similarly covered with sacred writing, which are sewn into small leather cases and worn on the body. But Nupe religious conscience is accommodating: pagans wear the Mohammedan charms as often as Mohammedans

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

consult a pagan (or semi-pagan) *cigbeci*. That the powers of *cigbe* are greater as well as more varied few will doubt; nor do the mallams themselves deny that many of the cures and other effects of *cigbe* are beyond their ken. It was, for example, a Moslem scholar of high repute who put me in touch with the *cigbeciži*, being himself a believer in the excellence of their art.

Modern medicine, as practised in hospitals and dispensaries, is a more serious rival. Nupe men and women who for the first time face this novel version of *cigbe* may be suspicious or openly afraid; often they will discontinue the visits to the doctor or dispenser, or leave unused the drugs they are given. A steadily increasing number, however, now have fair confidence in doctors and drugs and would be prepared to admit that our cures are on the whole better than theirs. This is true especially of minor surgical treatments and of injections of all kinds, that is, of treatments utterly unlike the indigenous practices and often 'miraculous' in their effect. This may seem a lukewarm statement; but I do not think that it can be put more positively or optimistically, at least as regards the average Nupe. Administration officials, teachers, and others who have been in close contact with Europeans are exceptions (though only to some extent).[1] Certainly, the Nupe are turning to European medicine much more slowly and waveringly than other African groups I know.

Now these other groups are also more primitive than the Nupe or without a similar, highly organized and would-be rational therapeutic skill. The diverse reaction is thus no accident. Fear and suspicion there would be in either case. But in the more primitive groups organized medicine, as a purely profane skill or knowledge, is entirely novel and unprecedented; it may have to fight religious prejudice, but not its own kind: while in Nupe precisely this is true. Other Africans might feel that European medicine clashes with their religious notions, or identify it with evil magic or witchcraft. The more sophisticated Nupe merely mistrusts the knife which, as everyone knows, 'cannot heal', or cynically suspects the doctors of poisoning patients who fail to recover. At best, he regards the European remedy as one of several possibilities, which he is wont to try out one after the other. And here the odds are not all in favour of the former.

[1] To wit, the following extract from an English composition on *The Hospital*, written in 1936 by a Nupe secondary school boy and corrected by his teacher. 'The disadvantage (of hospitals) is that when a man is taken there to be cured and if the nurses see that they cannot cure him, or perhaps he is given any kind of drugs and he still is exactly opposite as he was brought in, they give him a kind of medicine which makes he will die away.' The teacher found that only the last sentence needed correction, thus—'they give him a poison and he will die'.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

177 Many cases are already hopeless when they reach the doctors and
755 hospitals, with the result that their remedies will appear to be no
757 better than those of barbers or *cigbeciži*; above all, the European doctor does not profess to cure impotence or sterility, or to procure sterility; so that the most widely sought treatments are also an admitted gap in this new knowledge of 'medicine'.